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Mr. Whistlers Art Dicta

by

A.E. Gallatin

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Mr. Whistler's Art Dicta

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ingly curious answer. He answers in an unhesitating negative, and the cause, he says, is not far to find. "Women, who undoubtedly read poetry more than men, nowadays have much less spare time than was the case a generation ago, and moreover the training to-day is far less sentimental than it used to be." I may say that my correspondent is one of the most businesslike of the publishers, and I place great reliance on his judgment of books that will at least have a market. His opinion is therefore all the more strange in view of the number of women poets whom Mr. John Lane has brought out from first to last. Indeed, so characteristic a feature has this been of Mr. Lane's business that a writer of society verse once apostrophized Mr. Lane's shop as "Sapho's Bower in Vigo Street." With the exception of Mr. Kipling and Mr. William Watson, the writers of verse have within the last few years been made a great deal more of than men. I need only mention Mrs. Meynell, who created, or at least had created for her, a circle of devotees such as few writers can summon. Again, next to Mr. Yeats himself none of the new school of Irish verse writers has made such a mark as Mrs. Shorter; while few have been so industrious as Mrs Hinkson and Miss Norah Hopper.

There is one aspect of the subject where I think the poetry of to-day has not been bettered in the past; that is the recognition of form, apart from substance. Wordsworth himself in his later work threw to the winds the theory which he developed in the preface to the *Lyrical Ballads* of "natural language" —a theory, which, despite the appreciation of his out-and-out admirers, frequently reduced itself in practice to absolute doggerel. The fortunes of form have had a curious history since Wordsworth's day, We have carried it many steps forward, and Mr. Swinburne has extended its boundaries immensely. It reached its reductio ad absurdum in the revival of the old forms of French verse which made ballades as common as blackberries. In the hands of Mr. Henley, Mr. Dobson, and Mr. Lang, the fashion found valid exponents, but "all can rhyme when all can write" and it reached the point where ideas vanished in favor of metres and forms as difficult as a Chinese puzzle. The fashion expired for sheer lack of brains.

The most interesting development of form is that which is at the base of the young Celtic school. It is far removed from the tricks of the prim mechanical school, which relies upon language only.

Indeed some of the Irish poets seem to me to have an inadequate ear for metre and measure in this restricted sense. It is not in this direction that they rely for the effect of poetic music. The actual singing accompaniment which Mr. Yeats has advocated so strongly is most effective and it hides any defects in what may be called the minute mechanism of the mere spoken word. In any case its essential rightness for ballad poetry is unquestionable; and one cannot help feeling that it takes us back to the very origins of lyrical poetry.

I am not in a position to contrast this country with America so far as the appreciation of poetry goes, but I may say without hesitation that no poem has of recent years achieved anything approaching the boom of "The Man with the Hoe"; and it also may be maintained that the immense enthusiasm with which Mr. Kipling's "White Man's Burden" was received in the States was the first recognition on a large scale of his particular skill, for popular as his *Barrack Room Ballads* had been for years on this side, it must not be forgotten that they were introduced to the public by so exigent a critic as Mr. Henley, and in such a very particular magazine as the late lamented *Scots Observer*.

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Altogether I think that Mr. Austin is much too pessimistic. The great poet arises quite independent of the promptings of his contemporaries. These may encourage him, but they surely do not create him. There is moreover a curiously conventional view in confining the term poetry to rhythm. The great success of Maeterlinck—surely a poet if ever there was one—is an encouraging sign of the times; and, when I see the most popular London morning newspaper publishing his essays, I cannot think that the interest in the Higher Kinds of poetry is in such a bad way as Mr. Austin pictures.

MR. WHISTLER'S ART DICTA

By A. E. Gallatin

IN the autumn of 1897 the list of a London publisher's new publications contained the information that a new edition of "The Gentle Art of Making Enemies" was about to make its appearance, and Max Beerbohm seized upon this joyful news and made it the subject for one of his inimitable essays. "Oasis found in the desert of Mr. William Heinemann's Autumn List!" he exclaimed with proper enthusiasm, "most exquisite announcement!" But, alas, the "exquisite announcement" did not bear fruit, for Mr. Whistler's continued ill health—I have it on the authority of his publisher, and I chronicle it for the first time—Mr. Whistler's health did not permit him to make the exertion which the preparation of a new edition would entail.

And again are we doomed to disappointment. When Mr. Heinemann's Autumn, 1903 announcements began to crop out in the public prints, we discovered among them this selfsame "exquisite announcement." But again alas! for this new edition turned out to be nothing but a reprint of the edition published in 1892. However, let us not be too despondent, for the earlier editions of "The Gentle Art" are classed among those wondrous tomes which the auctioneer carefully designates as being "scarce," or "*very rare*," and we should, therefore, be duly grateful for this latest "Gentle Art," even if it be but a reprint.*

The first edition of Whistler's book, in which "The serious ones of this earth, carefully exasperated, have been prettily spurred on to unseemliness and indiscretion," bears the title-page which is here appended:—

| The Gentle Art of | Making Enemies: | Edited by Sheridan Ford | New York | Frederick Stokes and Brother | 1890.

This book is the collection of Whistler's letters to the London newspapers, and the accounts of his quarrels, which were prepared for publication by his secretary, Sheridan Ford, with Whistler's approval and assistance. Just as the book was about to go to press, Whistler suddenly decided to place the material in the hands of another, and he wrote to Mr. Ford, enclosing a cheque for ten guineas, and prayed him to let the matter rest. To this letter Sheridan Ford replied that he did not fancy this arrangement, and "I assure

* The Gentle Art of Making Enemies. A third edition. London MCMIV. William Heinemann.

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you that the book projected by me, will see the light in due season; and the story of your charming *camaraderie* being now public, will be scheduled with the rest of the trophies. So will this letter."

This, the earliest version of "The Gentle Art," comprises about the same collection of letters which a few months later appeared in the authorized edition, an essay by the editor on "Mr. Whistler as the 'Unattached Writer,'" and a chapter containing twenty-two Whistler anecdotes. Such is the matter which was published in this volume, a 12mo, of 256 pages, bound in green paper with type-set titles printed in red. When the book, after many futile efforts, finally appeared, it was promptly suppressed, and the few copies which survived are, I imagine, worth their weight in radium.

The edition of "The Gentle Art" which was "printed under" Whistler's "own immediate care and supervision" appeared the same year as the "garbled version" and bore the imprint in London of William Heinemann and in New York of J. W. Lovell. This volume, which was reprinted in 1892, with the edition of the catalogue of "Nocturnes, Marines, and Chevalet Pieces" and five letters, three written by Whistler, and the book of which the 1904 edition is an exact reprint, this volume is an octavo of 292 pages, bound in brown boards stamped in gold. The matter contained in it comprises fifty-eight letters written by Whistler to the press, many quotations from newspapers, several interviews, Whistler's account of the Ruskin v. Whistler case, "Mr. Whistler and his Critics," this being the catalogue of an exhibition of his etchings and dry-points, with quotations from his critics under each title, and frequent annotations by Whistler, as well as a number of pieces of art-criticism.

II.

All of Whistler's contributions to the literature of art criticism are to be found collected in "The Gentle Art," as are all of his writings, in fact, except "The Baronet and the Butterfly." They bear the following titles:—"Whistler *v.* Ruskin;" "Art and Art Critics;" "The Propositions;" "The Propositions, No. 2;" "The Red Rag;" Mr. Whistler's "Ten O'clock," and "A Further Proposition."

The first of these is Whistler's commentaries on the famous case indicated by its title, the second is a set of rules for etchers; the third are rules for the guidance of art-critics; "The Red Rag" is an interview with Whistler in which he explains his theories; the "Ten O'clock" is his lecture on art delivered in London, Cambridge and Oxford, in 1885; and the "Further Proposition" instructs painters in what manner they should paint flesh.

In the course of a review of D. S. MacColl's "XIX Century Art" in the March, 1903, *Fortnightly Review*, Arthur Symons said, "Everything that Mr. Whistler has written about painting deserves to be taken seriously," and certainly this is but a fair valuation of Whistler's art dicta. The well-written account of Whistler's art which Messrs. Way and Dennis have lately given us contains a chapter on "Mr. Whistler as a Writer," * and in this essay the authors have echoed Mr. Symons' opinion. And they have made a more complete statement of the case by saying that the remaining contents of "The Gentle Art," his "ephemeral quarrels," are "better forgotten."

Whistler's pamphlet, "Art and Art Critics," is a "vigorous onslaught on the critics," as Messrs. Way and Dennis

* The Art of James McNeill Whistler. An Appreciation. By T. R. Way and G. R. Dennis. London: George Bell & Sons, 1903.

term it, and Whistler's opinion that the painter should be the "critic and sole authority" on painting was disputed in the strongest terms at the time by the art critic of the *Times*, Tom Taylor, who insisted that the opposite of this was true, and wrote (the document is given in "The Gentle Art"): "God help the artists if ever the criticism of pictures falls into the hands of painters! It would be a case of vivisection all round."

An essay, assuredly, on the artist as art critic would be very interesting—and if only to show that his naturally prejudiced opinions are but of little value. Whistler, however, was the great exception, and we are in full accord with Messrs. Way and Dennis when they say that "A collection of his *obiter dicta* would make an excellent text-book on the underlying principles of art," and also when they add that: " a study of them would do much—indeed it has done much—to raise the general level of art criticism."

COURAGE

By Jeannette Bliss Gillespy

From "The Eastward Road," by permission of James Pott & Co.

IF in the days that now are at an end
I had been false in deed or look or word
To that unspoken vow our spirits heard
When eyes met eyes and each life claimed a friend—
If ever I had stooped my soul to spend
Less than the gold of love, or ever stirred
To action by a baser motive spurred
Than to be worthy—fate could make me bend.

But, love, look back across the changeful years—
Is not our friendship high and true and brave,
Strong to all service, swift in high emprise?
If we must part, then, let there be no tears.
Life cannot daunt us—and beyond the grave
We shall stand up and look God in the eyes.

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